

NCA  
VOC FOR IOP/FN  
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## THE MEOS OF LAOS

ANNCR:

MEO HILL TRIBESMEN HAVE BEEN RESISTING THE COMMUNISTS IN LAOS SINCE THE PATHET LAO SEIZED POWER IN VIENTIANE IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-FIVE. BUT UNDER PRESSURE FROM LAO AND VIETNAMESE MILITARY FORCES, TENS OF THOUSANDS OF MEOS HAVE FLED TO THAILAND, RATHER THAN FACE DEATH OR WHAT THEY CONSIDER SUBJUGATION. FROM BANGKOK, WAYNE COREY HAS FILED THIS BACKGROUND REPORT ON THE MEOS, WHO HAVE FIGURED PROMINENTLY IN THE NEWS FROM LAOS FOR NEARLY TWO DECADES: VOICE:

IN THE EARLY NINETEEN SIXTIES, THE MEOS LED BY GENERAL VANG PAO, WERE A MAJOR FORCE IN THE WAR BETWEEN THE NEUTRALIST GOVERNMENT IN VIETIANE AND THE LAO COMMUNISTS. THE MEOS, WHO ORIGINALLY CAME FROM SOUTHERN CHINA, FOUGHT AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THEIR SIMPLE AND NOMADIC WAY OF LIFE IN THE MOUNTAINS OF NORTHERN LAOS. THEY NUMBERED ABOUT A QUARTER MILLION.

BUT A LAO SOURCE WITH MEO CONTACTS TOLD THIS CORRESPONDENT THAT THE MEOS WERE READY TO COOPERATE WITH THE COMMUNISTS, THEN CALLED THE PATIENT LAO, ONCE THE WAR IN LAOS ENDED. SOME, HE SAID, HEEDED A CALL BY FAYDANG, ONE OF THE FEW WELL-KNOWN MEO LEADERS TO ACTIVELY SUPPORT THE COMMUNISTS TO JOIN IN RECONSTRUCTING THE COUNTRY. BUT HE SAID THOSE WHO SURRENDERED WERE SENT TO REEDUCATION CAMPS, MISTREATED OR EVEN EXECUTED. HE SAID THE UNYIELDING DISCIPLINE OF THE COMMUNISTS AND EXPANDING VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE OVER LAOS BECAME INTOLERABLE TO THE MEOS.

SO, FOR MORE THAN TWO YEARS, THE MEOS AND REMNANTS OF THE FORMER NON-COMMUNIST ARMY HAVE BEEN FIGHTING A GUERRILLA WAR.

GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY VEHICLES ON MAJOR ROADS, INCLUDING HIGHWAY THIRTEEN BETWEEN VIENTIANE AND THE OLD ROYAL CAPITAL OF LUANG PRA ANG, HAVE BEEN ATTACKED AND ISOLATED COMMUNIST MILITARY OUT-POSTS HAVE BEEN WIPED OUT.

IN THE COUNTRYSIDE OF NORTHERN LAOS, AN ESTIMATED TWENTY THOUSAND MEOS ARE STILL FIGHTING, BUT PRIMARILY FOR SURVIVAL. THEIR RESISTANCE TO THE COMMUNISTS IS SCATTERED AND SPONTANEOUS, BECAUSE THERE IS NO ORGANIZED NATIONWIDE COORDINATION. THE MEOS FACE SHORTAGES OF FOOD, MEDICINE AND MILITARY SUPPLIES.

THE LAO GOVERNMENT HAS REPEATEDLY DENIED THAT VIETNAMESE TROOPS ARE IN LAOS OR THAT THE COUNTRY IS NOW DOMINATED BY VIETNAM. BUT, ACCORDING TO THE LAO SOURCE, IT'S THE PRESENCE OF AN ESTIMATED TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND VIETNAMESE TROOPS IN LAOS AND THE HARSH COMMUNIST RULE THAT ARE CAUSING MORE AND MORE MEOS TO FLEE TO THAILAND. THE SOURCE SAYS COMMUNISM IS CONTRARY TO THE TRADITIONAL WAY OF LIFE IN LAOS, ONCE KNOWN AS THE EASY GOING LAND OF A MILLION ELEPHANTS.

THE MEOS MUST FIGHT, SURRENDER, DIE OR FLEE. APPARENTLY, FEW ARE SURRENDERING. LAOS IS SURROUNDED ON ALL SIDES BY LARGER AND MORE POWERFUL COUNTRIES. THIS GEOGRAPHIC FACT OF LIFE WAS THE SOURCE OF A LAO PROVERB WHICH SAYS, "WHEN THE ELEPHANTS PLAY, THE GRASS WILL BE TRAMPLED." THE GRASS IN THAT PROVERB REPRESENTED THE TERRITORY OF LAOS. NOW, THE GRASS COULD WELL REPRESENT THE MEOS.

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